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ABSTRACT

This lesson is based on the John F. Kennedy National Historic Site (Massachusetts), the birthplace of President John F. Kennedy. The lesson can be used as a biographical study, an introduction to the Kennedy presidency and the turbulent sixties, or as part of a unit on post-World War II U.S. history. Primary and secondary sources are included for students to use to help strengthen their skills in analytical reading and interpretation related to history. The sources also help students understand that history and culture are shaped by the lives and accomplishments of the people of a society, and that one individual can make a difference. The student objectives are: (1) to list the values that Joseph and Rose Kennedy tried to instill in their children; (2) to identify reasons why we remember John Fitzgerald Kennedy today; (3) to consider the effects of family culture, or family environment, and community on the development of character and personality; and (4) to investigate the Kennedy traditions, values, interests, and the neighborhood they grew up in, and discuss the effects these have had on the development of their personality and character. (LB)

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Teaching with Historic Places

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National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
1849 C. Street, N.W., Suite NC400
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Birthday of John F. Kennedy: Home of the Boy Who Would Be President

John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) was a man who made a difference. He was both the youngest man ever elected president of the United States and the first Roman Catholic to hold that office. Those qualities reinforced for many the belief that any American could become president.

Although JFK was a member of an extraordinary American family of entrepreneurs, statesmen and civic leaders, he spent the first four years of his childhood in a modest home in Brookline, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. Brookline's lovely tree-lined streets, good schools, and space for children to play made it an attractive place to raise a family. It was there that Rose Kennedy and her husband Joseph began instilling the high standards and ambition that would make the Kennedys one of America's most famous families.

[1]*From an oral interview with Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, John F. Kennedy National Historic Site, 1969.*

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About This Lesson

The lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file, "John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site," and other source materials from John F. Kennedy National Historic Site. It was written by Leslie C. Obleschuk, an education specialist at John F. Kennedy National Historic Site.

Where it fits into the curriculum

Topics: This lesson can be used as a biographical study, an introduction to the Kennedy presidency and the turbulent sixties, or as part of a unit on post-World War II American history. Students will work with primary and secondary sources and will strengthen their skills in analytical reading and interpretation related to history. Furthermore, it will help students understand that history and culture are shaped by the lives and accomplishments of the people of a society, and that one individual can make a difference. Time period: 20th Century

Time period: 20th Century

Objectives for students

1) To list the values that Joseph and Rose Kennedy tried to instill in their children.

2) To identify reasons why we remember JFK today.

3) To consider the effects of family culture or family environment and community on the development of character and personality.

4) To investigate their family traditions, values, interests, and the neighborhood they grew up in, and discuss the effects these have had on the development of their personality and character.

Materials for students

The materials listed below either can be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students. The map and images appear twice: in a low-resolution version with associated questions and alone in a larger, high-resolution version.

1) one map of John F. Kennedy National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts;

2) three readings that describe the Kennedy family and the house where

JFK was born and an excerpt from JFK's inaugural address;

3) five photographs of the Kennedy family home as well as family photos;

4) a document recording JFK's health record and other important information.

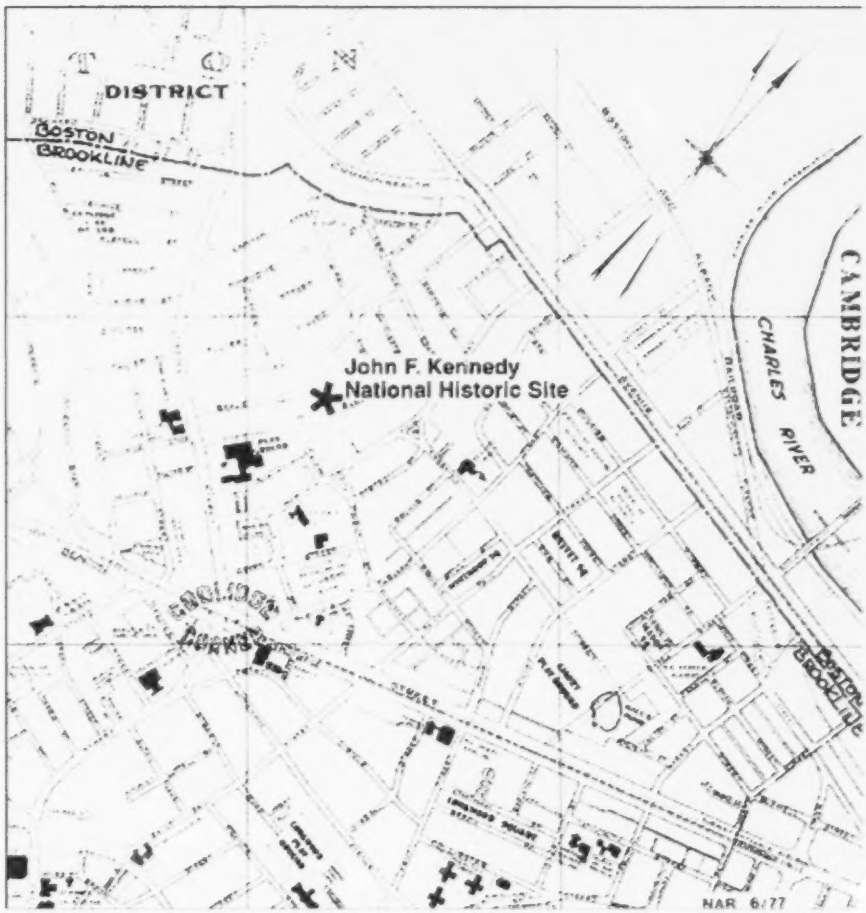
Visiting the site

John F. Kennedy National Historic Site, administered by the National Park Service, is open to the public by guided tour only, Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., from early May through late October. For further information, write the Superintendent, John F. Kennedy National Historic Site, 83 Beals Street, Brookline, MA 02446 or visit the park web pages at http://www.nps.gov/jofi/

Setting the Stage

The Kennedy story began in Ireland the 1840s, where a blight caused the failure of four consecutive potato crops. Facing starvation, hundreds of thousands of Irish peasants left for America. While they settled along the eastern seaboard, so many ended up in Boston, Massachusetts that by 1855 more than a third of the city's population was Irish. Among these immigrants were Patrick Kennedy and Thomas Fitzgerald; like many others, they worked hard, married, and raised families. Unlike any of the others, however, within little more than 100 years these two immigrant families put one of their own into the highest office in America. In 1914 their grandchildren, Joseph P. Kennedy and Rose Fitzgerald, married and eventually had nine children. Their second son, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, became the 35th president of the United States.

Locating the Site
Map 1: John F. Kennedy National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts.



Questions for Map 1

1. Using a large map of the United States, have students locate Boston and Cape Cod, Massachusetts, New York City, and Washington, D.C., all places where Kennedy lived.

2. Using the above map, note the area around the home the Kennedys bought in Brookline, the first suburb west of Boston. What features might have made it a good place to raise children?

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Determining the Facts

Reading 1: The Kennedy Family Background

John Fitzgerald Kennedy (often called Jack) was born and spent his early childhood in a modest, three-story, wooden frame house at 83 Beals Street in Brookline, Massachusetts. Joseph P. Kennedy had purchased the house in anticipation of his marriage to Rose Fitzgerald in 1914. The family moved to a larger home nearby in 1921 when John was four years old.

The house at 83 Beals Street was built in 1909. It stands in a middle-class area which was still under development when the Kennedys moved to Brookline. They chose the neighborhood for its spaciousness, good schools, and its proximity to the trolley lines to Boston. Joseph Kennedy did not own a car when the family first moved there, so he took the trolley to work in Boston.

Joseph Kennedy had already begun his illustrious career in business and finance by the time he married. The son of a prosperous family from East Boston, Kennedy had attended Harvard and graduated in 1912. He was first a bank examiner and active in real estate and at 25 he became president of the Columbia Trust Company. In 1917 he became assistant general manager of the Fore River Shipyards. It was there that he met Franklin D. Roosevelt, for whom he later served as Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Kennedy left the shipyard in 1919 to accept a position in the investment firm of Hayden, Stone, & Company, a job that launched Kennedy into the stock market. Witnin a decade he made his first million dollars through stocks, and he also invested in the fast-growing motion picture industry.

Though he was shrewd and successful in business, Joseph Kennedy found over time that the same men he did business with would not socialize with him because of his Irish Catholic heritage. That led him to make several decisions about how to protect his children from the same problem. For example, he sent his sons to a private school that was favored by well-to-do Brookline families, because he thought his boys would be more accepted as adults if they established friendships at an early age.

His wife was endowed with intelligence, poise, and a zest for living. Educated in the U.S. and in Europe, she also grew up in the world of Boston politics. Through her father, John F. Fitzgerald, twice mayor of Boston around the turn of the century and member of Congress, she had opportunities to meet leading men and women in all fields, and she developed a keen interest in current affairs. Soon after marriage she focused on motherhood, with the arrival of four children in five years. She believed that raising a family was a profession as important and certainly as demanding as any other.

Both parents possessed a keen awareness of their heritage and how far their families had come, and they tried to develop the same sensibility in their children. Mrs. Kennedy later commented, "I think naturally of my grandchildren, where they came from and how they happened to be where they are. They came—on the Kennedy-Fitzgerald side—from ancestors who were quite poor and disadvantaged through no fault of their own but who had the imagination, the resolve, the intelligence, and the energy to seek a newer, better world for themselves and their families."1 Pride in the family heritage was not the only trait the Kennedys tried to develop in their children. It was in Brookline that the Kennedys began developing a wide range of values in their children: an appreciation of the arts, a sense of history, personal discipline, a spirit of competition and fierce determination, the blessing of religious faith, the worthiness of public service, pride in their Irish heritage, a love of books and the value of good education, family loyalty, and physical prowess. Together Rose and Joseph decided what more they wanted for their children, and then set out to make these things possible.

Questions for Reading 1

1. What kind of advantages did Joseph and Rose Kennedy have which they hoped to pass on to their nine children?

2. How did Rose and Joseph Kennedy's heritage affect their lives? How did it affect the way they raised their children?

3. Review the list of values the Kennedys wanted to instill in their children. Which two or three of these values do you believe are most important for children to accept? Check with your classmates to see if they listed the same values as you did; if not, why do you think there are differences among class members?

1Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, Times to Remember (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974), 518.

Adapted and excerpted from the National Park Service's visitor's guide for John F. Kennedy National Historic Site and the transcript of oral interviews with Rose Kennedy, John F. Kennedy National Historic Site, 1969.

Determining the Facts
Reading 2: Daily Life at 83 Beals Street

The Daily Life excerpts are from a transcript of a house tour with Rose Kennedy, John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site, 1969.

Living Room

We spent a lot of time in this room in the evening. Mr. Kennedy was president of a bank and this was his one opportunity to read the newspaper or his favorite detective stories. He would sit in that red chair by the gateleg table. We all read the Boston Transcript in the evening in those days. Usually I would sit in the wing chair by the table opposite him. I can't see that chair without remembering the holes in the children's stockings. They wore knickers then and the boys' knee stockings always had holes in them. They had to be darned once or twice a week.

When the children were ready for bed and had said their prayers they would come to the living room and play for a little while before we put them to bed....I spent a good deal of time reading to the children...I would make no engagements outside in the evening so that I could be with the children to help them with their school work, to doctor their colds, or to find out what activities they had been interested in during the day.

The piano was a wedding gift and at Christmas, with the tree over there by the south window, I would play and we would all sing Christmas carols. The children did not do too well with their piano lessons. Radio was a new thing then and they said that people wouldn't want to listen to them play when they could hear the same songs on the radio.

The pictures are copies of famous paintings I had studied in the European galleries. It gave me great pleasure to have these copies in my home and I thought it an inspiration for the children to grow up with them.

Master Bedroom

The president was born in the twin bed, near the window, on May 29th,1917, at three o'clock in the afternoon....When you hold your baby in your arms the first time and you think of all the things you can say and do to influence him, it's a tremendous responsibility. What you do with him and for him can influence not only him, but everyone he meets and not for a day or a month or a year but for time and for eternity....When Jack was elected president, I thought how fortunate I was out of all the millions of mothers in the United States to be the one to have her son inaugurated president on that cold, cold day.

The pictures over the beds are copies of Italian paintings of the Madonna and Child I had seen and liked. My mother and father gave us Irish linen bedspreads, which were

hand-embroidered with shamrocks, thistles and other Irish symbols and were great treasures. The photograph on Mr. Kennedy's dresser is of his mother and father. On the far wall are the traditional six month pictures of Joe Jr., Jack, Rosemary and Kathleen. Some people say that all babies look alike but I can tell the difference even at that age.

Nursery

This bassinet has been used by Kennedy children and grandchildren in the years since Joe Jr. and Jack first slept in it here in the nursery. The books were a favorite pastime. Probably Jack's favorite book was King Arthur and His Knights. I was very careful to select books which were recommended at school or by a children's bookshop. My children, however, were indifferent to these edifying selections for one of Jack's book treasures was Billy Whiskers, a story about a goat, which my mother bought in a department store. The illustrations seemed to me to be crude and the colors harsh but the boys adored the stories and delighted in the whole series, pictures and all.

The christening dress in the corner was given to me by my mother-in-law, who had it made by the Franciscan nuns in East Boston where the family lived. All the children and John Jr., the president's son, have worn this dress. The little Irish bonnet, a gift, is profusely covered with shamrocks. The president was baptized at Saint Aidan's, the neighborhood church. Mothers were confined for three weeks then, and so the celebration was always a small, informal family gathering. I wanted the children christened as soon as possible so I was never present at the ceremony.

There were more toys in here then of course. The president liked steam engines, teddy bears and the usual boys' toys, but especially books of adventure. You couldn't give a sick child a radio or a television set then, to keep him occupied, because there were none in 1917. We spent a lot of time reading and entertaining the children here in this room, particularly when Jack had scarlet fever in 1920.

Guest Room and Boudoir

In a house this size, with the number of children we had, this room alternated between being a guest room and later a children's bedroom. In those days it had a good clear view down the street and was a very pleasant room. It is furnished very much like our own bedroom with the Irish linen bedspread and the silver toilet set.

I used this smaller room as a study. On the desk is one of my wedding invitations and some early photographs of my family. Here I did my correspondence and kept a card file on the children's health. That was a most helpful system. I purchased a card file from the stationers near here and recorded all the important information about each of the children. It helped so much to be able to check back on symptoms of illness, weight,

diet and all the important information, such as vaccinations, schick tests, confirmation dates, et cetera. I would recommend this idea to any mother.

Dining Room

This dining room might well have been the most important room in the house for much of our family life. While they were small, the children had their meals at the table by the window. The silver napkin rings and the porringers were used by the president and his older brother and carry their monograms. The silver tea set and coffee server were wedding presents. The china was also a gift from my sister-in-law, Margaret Kennedy Burke, who painted the gold border at Notre Dame Convent when she was a student. The children never knew which one would be called upon to say grace before meals, so they were all on their toes. On holidays I remember we would discuss the events which were being commemorated, such as the battle in Lexington and Concord on April 19th. On Sundays we would talk about the gospel at Mass. If they didn't pay attention one Sunday they would the next as they knew they would be questioned.

We didn't do much formal entertaining here. We preferred to have informal dinners with a few friends. Cocktail parties were not customary in those days. A little wine or champagne was served at weddings and christenings.

Kitchen

There on the stove you see the bean pot. We always ate Boston baked beans on Saturday nights. Warmed over for Sunday morning breakfast they were perfectly delicious with brown bread....With all the baby bottles to be sterilized, formulas to prepare and meals to cook this kitchen was a very busy place. During those hectic hours I would put the baby in the stroller, take two children by the hand, and with the dog following close behind, set out for the corner grocery store. On the way back we would usually stop for a visit at Saint Aidan's church. I wanted my children to realize that church was for every day in the week and not just for Sunday....

We were very happy here and although we did not know about the days ahead, we were enthusiastic and optimistic about the future.

Questions for Reading 2

1. What impressions did you form about what life was like for the Kennedys between 1917 and 1921?

2. What kind of atmosphere or family environment did the Kennedys provide

for their children?

3. What items displayed in the house reflected the Kennedy's values and beliefs?

4. What kinds of information did Rose Kennedy record in her card file? Why would keeping a file on each child have been important?

Determining the Facts
Reading 3: Excerpts from John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address

We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom...signifying renewal as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago.

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe...that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed....

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty. This much we pledge—and more.

To those peoples in the huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves....If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

To our sister republics south of our border, we offer...to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty....Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas....

Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in...self-destruction.

So let us begin anew—remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of laboring those problems which divide us.

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Let both sides unite to heed in all corners of the earth the command of Isaiah—to "undo the heavy burdens [and] let the oppressed go free."

All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days...nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it....The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you: Ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: Ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man. Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

Questions for Reading 3

1. What emotions do you think this speech tried to evoke from the audience? Which sections aim at which emotions?

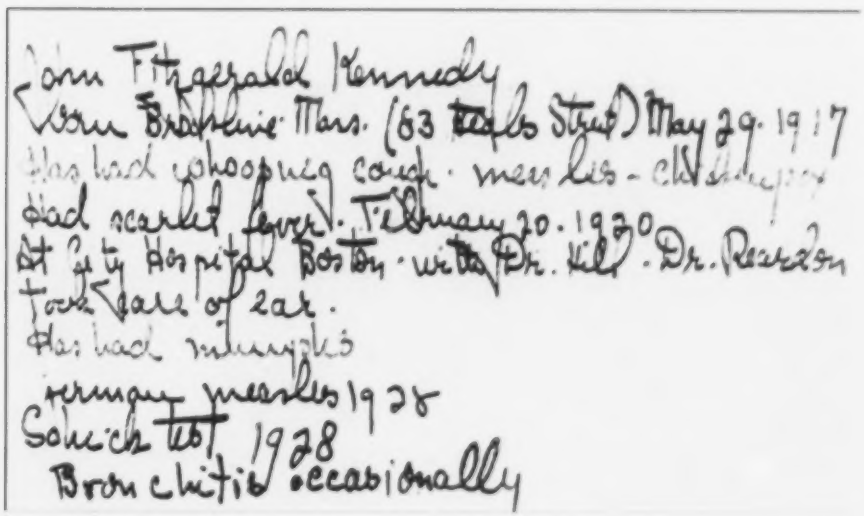
2. Why do you think Kennedy impressed so many people on that day?

3. Do you find the content of the speech to be relevant today?

4. How many of the values his parents tried to instill in him are represented in the speech? How many of those values seem relevant today? Why do you think that those that are not relevant became that way?

Delivered January 20, 1961. From the Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

Determining the Facts
Document 1: JFK's Health Card


John Fitzgerald Kennedy
born Brookline Mass. 163 Beals St. May 29. 1917
Has had whooping cough. measles - chicken pox
Had scarlet fever. February 20. 1920
St Luke Hospital Boston. with Dr. Hill. Dr. Reardon
took care of case.
Has had mumps
German measles 1928
Scarlet Fever 1928
Bronchitis occasionally

Questions for Document 1

1. What diseases did Jack Kennedy have before he was 11 years old?

2. How would you describe JFK's health as a child?

3. Did your parents keep a file or a "baby book" for you? How does that book compare with the card kept for Jack Kennedy?

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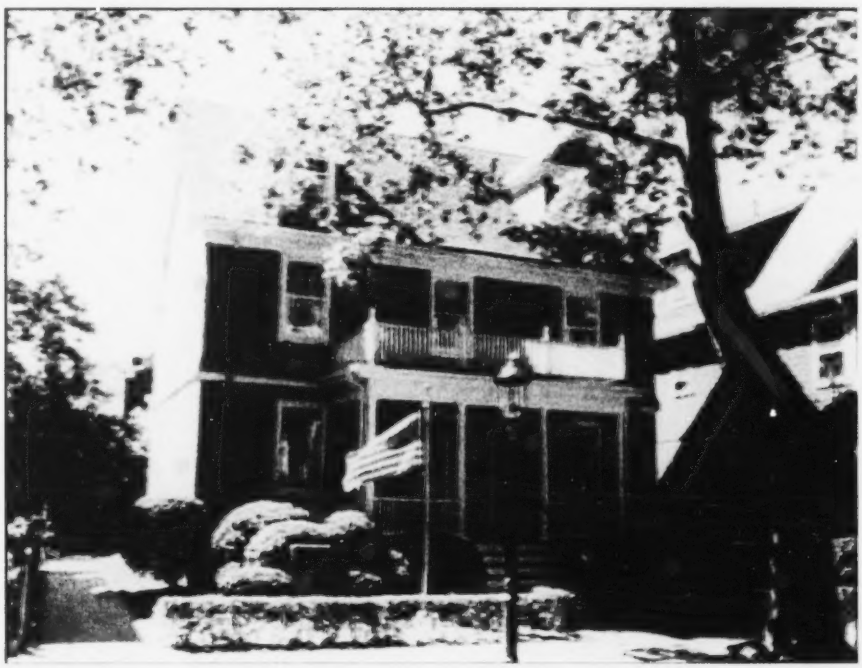
Visual Evidence

Photo 1: The Kennedy family home at 83 Beals Street, Brookline, Massachusetts.



Questions for Photo 1

1. What does the size of this house indicate about the family's economic status?

2. Look back at Reading 2, where Rose Kennedy describes four rooms. Where do you think those rooms were within the house? Why?

Visual Evidence

Photo 2: John and Joseph Kennedy, Jr. c.1919

(Kennedy Family Collection, John F. Kennedy Library)

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Visual Evidence
Photo 3: John F. Kennedy (lower left) and family, 1921

(Copyright Bachrach)

Questions for Photos 2 & 3

1. Do these photos make the Kennedy family seem typical or unusual? Why?

Visual Evidence
Photo 4: John F. Kennedy, c. 1925

(Kennedy Family Collection, John F. Kennedy Library)

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Questions for Photo 4

1. What do you think John F. Kennedy was doing when this photo was taken? How would his clothes be different if he were growing up today?

Visual Evidence
Photo 5:(Left to Right) Robert, John, Eunice, Jean, Joseph, Sr., Rose, Patricia, Kathleen, Joseph, Jr.,Rosemary, 1931

(Photo by Richard W. Sears. Kennedy Family Collection, John F. Kennedy Library)

Questions for Photo 5

1. Where might this photo have been taken? Why do you think so?

2. Does this photo help you to better determine the Kennedy family experience? Why or why not?

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Putting It All Together

American history and culture are both shaped by the accomplishments of individuals. The 1960 election of John F. Kennedy as the youngest elected and the first Roman Catholic president of the United States reinforced for many the American beliefs that one person can make a difference.

Activity 1: Why Do We Remember John F. Kennedy?

Many people remember John F. Kennedy's presidency as a time when Americans had a true sense of pride in their country. Many looked toward the future with hope and confidence in the idea that the United States could help build a better world. Divide the class into four groups to investigate four of the important issues of President Kennedy's administration: the space program, civil rights, the peace corps, and the nuclear arms race. Ask each team to make a report to the class.

Many of the issues and problems that concerned President Kennedy are still with us today. Assign each student to find a recent newspaper article dealing with one of the four issues studied and to share it with the class. They should describe the following: the issue discussed in the article; changes that have occurred, if any, since Kennedy's time; why the issue is still important today; and what can be done today to solve the problem or issue.

Activity 2: Changing Attitudes Over Time

Ask all students to read a profile of Kennedy that was written just after his death. Then assign them to find an assessment of him in the years since; one student might look at a year after his death, another five years, another ten years, and so on. Have each student (or group) to write up a brief summary of what has changed and what has remained the same, and then read this report to the rest of the class. When all have finished, have them discuss how opinions about JFK have developed since his assassination. Be sure to have them consider why this has happened.

Activity 3: Who Am I?

The character of each of us is formed by a combination of heredity and environment. Ask students to assemble a list of family traditions, important family values, and special family stories. Have them interview family members to provide more information including how these traditions, etc., became an important part of their family history. Are they important to the students? Will they pass down the same traditions to their own families? Why or why not? Now have students consider the community where they grew up. How have their surroundings influenced their own personality and character?

As an alternative assignment, ask students to find a special family photograph and describe, in writing, what it shows about their own development and their relationship

with their family. To facilitate the writing, ask questions such as: How old is the photograph? Who or what is in the picture? Where was it taken? By whom? Why is it an event, place, or time to remember?

John F. Kennedy--Supplementary Resources

Birthplace of John F. Kennedy: Home of the Boy Who Would Be President examines the formative years of the youngest man ever to be elected president of the United States. Below are materials for further exploration of the subjects this lesson considers.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site http://www.nps.gov/jofi/
The John Fitzgerald Kennedy NHS is a unit of the National Park System. The park's web pages provide a biographical sketch of JFK as well as information about the park.

National Archives http://www.nara.gov/
The Archives has placed on its web site a large number of items about John F. Kennedy and details about his presidency. To find them, visit the NAIL Digital Copies search engine.

American Presidents, Life Portraits http://www.americanpresidents.org/
In this series, C-SPAN explores the life stories of the 41 men who have been president by traveling to presidential homes, museums, libraries, and grave sites and speaking with presidential scholars. American Presidents, Life Portraits will focus on one president each week, including John F. Kennedy on November 5, 1999.

John F. Kennedy Library and Museum http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/main.html
The John F. Kennedy Library and Museum, located in Boston, Massachusetts, is one of the Presidential Libraries administered by the National Archives and Records Administration. This web site includes biographical information, presidential recordings, copies of speeches, and resources for educators.

John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/main.html
Read the entire text of the 1961 inaugural address and hear President Kennedy giving the address that morning.

Arlington National Cemetery http://www.arlingtoncemetery.com/jfk.htm
Arlington National Cemetery serves as the final resting place for the thirty-fifth president. This web site includes information and photographs about Kennedy's death and burial.